PEAKS OF SHALA

776 heard them singing, and once, in the Wood of the Ora, which we will pass to-morrow, I heard 761 them[1] talking together in the twilight. I heard 776 them say that my cousin would die," said Cheremi, seriously.

"And did he die?"

"Of course," said he, surprised by the question. "He was a strong man, but within six weeks, sitting beside the fire one night, he said that he felt a pain in his heart, and in an hour he was dead." Cheremi crossed himself.

361 "But about the city of Pog. Does anyone ever go there? Could we go there?"

People sometimes went, he said; the shepherds always went to cut the branches of the trees, which belonged to the tribe of Pultit. How far was it from where we stood? He thought for [804] a time, and said, "Four hours." Albanians have no measure for distance except the time it takes to walk it, and this time corresponds with no measurement of ours. He had said that our walk of that day would be an hour and a half; we had already been exhausting every ounce of energy and breath for four, and were scarcely a third of the way.

"What does one find when one gets there?"

"Very little. There is the old wall which you see, and on the rock one can follow the lines of the walls of houses, built square and with many rooms, and from the rocks which have fallen they must have been tall houses. That is all, except that on some of the large stones one can

1 [The ora or nature spirits-[46] Analyst]

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423 informant in Bytyç their business was to prop up the big stone. The association of the three, one big and two small, was so distinct that it could be seen at a glance that they were boundary stones.

In old days, in places as far apart as Kurvelesh in south-west Albania and Lumë in the north-east, some pieces of charcoal, generally three, were put under the big boundary stone; in Lumë a fragment of tile was added. Centuries might pass, but charcoal and tile remained as imperishable evidence of the true line of the [623] boundary. In case one neighbour charged the other with moving the stones the elders dug these up; if they found no charcoal under them they knew they had been moved and dug all round until they came on charcoal and with it the original boundary. A man who went to move boundary stones always went on a dark night when the buried charcoal was as invisible as himself, and so far as was known his ingenuity never ran to taking a handful with him from home.

Boundary stones were set up with all the ceremony befitting [623] a mark that was to last for ever. All the members of the families concerned, the village elders, as many children and youths of the village as possible, as many men from neighbouring villages as possible and all the tribal elders gathered to witness the event and [804] to preserve its memory for their lifetime. When the entity to be divided—field, farmyard, vineyard, etc.—had been measured with a rope or by pacing into the required number of portions, the elder chosen to delimit the boundary put any chance stone and a clod of earth on his right shoulder, and after swearing upon his soul to delimit justly, moved forward along the boundary line followed by all the witnesses. It was his duty to walk in a straight line in order to iron out every possibility of future conflict—'a boundary mustn't twist' said the law—but if he deviated slightly no one 789 could correct him; it was his responsibility. All the objector could 423 do was to say, 'Well, lead the way and if you don't act righteously may that weight lie heavy on you in the other life'. At the two ends and in the middle the elder—no one else—dug a hole in which he set up the big stone at one end, packing the smaller ones round it. When he finished, he laid his hand on the big stone and solemnly cursed anyone who should seek to move it, saying in Mirditë, 'Whoever moves this stone, shall be weighted down with it in the life beyond'. In Lumë the curse was vaguer, 'Here are your boundaries, men', said the elder. 'Don't move them because it's bad'—in this world where quarrelling results and in the other